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Asset Ownership Pattern of the Coastal Fishermen: A Poverty Polemic

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Abstract

This study gives emphasis on property ownership pattern of the coastal fisherman in the study area. Property ownership among the fishermen includes fishing equipment such as boats, engines and trawls. The pattern of equipment ownership related to the economic significance of the fishermen is given due attention because the productivity of the local fisherman is highly dependent on the equipment. In this regard, 200 respondents consisting of small-scale fishermen were interviewed using questionnaires. The findings show that mapping of the fishermen's economic equipment ownership in the study area can be divided into three main methods of procurement, namely through purchasing, leasing and owned by the employer. The findings also show that the fishermen' dependency on middleman still exists although not directly. The study concludes that the coastal fishermen in the study area are poor not because there is no skill or technology as fishermen. They are poor because they are not able to access to the dimensions of the physical production assets such as boats, engines, and finances. Hence some recommendations on improving their marine knowledge such as engagement in agro-tourism to help them out of the long-time poverty polemic.

Keywords: *Property Ownership, Pattern, Coastal Fisherman, Middleman, Marine Knowledge*

Introduction

Basically, fishermen play a very important role in increasing the productivity of fisheries in the country, however, it does not touch on aspects relating to the improvement in their well being Marron,D (2013). The intervention in the coastal community development programmes, commonly practiced by the Fisheries Department clearly prove a form of recognition of the existence of poverty

among the fishermen communities (Carrasco & Menéndez 2013). This is evident in the context of the national development sub-sector development whereby focus of the national development in the 10th Malaysia Plan is to increase the average community's income from RM1,440.00 a month in 2009 to RM2300.00 in 2005 (Kementerian Pertanian dan Industri Asas Tani 2005). In this regard, from the social perspective, the groups who received less development benefit such as the coastal community, especially the coastal fishermen, have been given due assistance. Aids in the context of boats, engines and trawls subsidies were provided in order to eradicate the hardcore poor fishermen (Kementerian Pertanian dan Industri Asas Tani 2004).

A study on fishermen community also found that there were several fishermen community features (Firth 1990; Ishak 1994) such as the coastal fishermen have homogeneous socio-economic, the job as fishermen is their main source of income, lack of capital, skills and technology. This situation provides an overview of the constraints faced by the fishermen community when the community failed to control the fishery equipment regarded as a fixed capital in handling the fishermen's economic activities (Ishak 1994) on the other hand, factors affecting the fisherman poverty is multidimensional. However, the main issue which causes the fishermen's poverty is related to the unfavourable economic policy that gives less benefit to the fishermen. For example, they do not have an adequate access to the primary resources needed to improve their economic situation to the extent that they are forced to live under the poverty standard (Barclay 2013). In this case, the phenomenon of poverty in fishing communities will not end by only providing aids because often the aspects relating to the mapping of ownership, which is the main pillar is not seen from the fishermen perspective itself (Radzi & Zaimah 2014).

The coastal community is also known as the traditional fishermen. The traditional fishermen are using small boats, simple fishing equipment such as drift-net, drag-net, fishing rods, fishing net and others and operating in coastal waters (Hussain et al. 2015). The fishing operation are carried out by one or two fishermen who return home on daily basis, going in the early morning and coming back in the afternoon or going in the afternoon, coming back in the morning and the catch is small and only for self-subsistence (Raduan et al. 2007). Therefore, it is not surprising if the coastal fishermen are very dependent on Government aids and support. There are six factors that have led the fishermen in particular the coastal fishermen to continue to be poor; lack of capital to buy boats and modern equipment, low fishermen's productivity capacity, the fishermen's low rate of re-investment, the sharing system practiced in catching cooperative, the pricing system that is a disadvantage to the fishermen, and seasonal fishing pattern (Nik Mustaffa 1987).

Research in the study area found that majority of the population are fishermen. Hence, this paper will focus on the mapping of assets ownership in the coastal fishermen economies. The study explicitly examined the pattern of their ownership of the type of capital equipment found in the fishery economy and its relation to other physical possession such as home and land. The question arises is how the entire fishery economy equipment such as boats, fishing nets, engines are owned and controlled by the fishermen in the study area. Circumstances associated to the fishermen's ownership patterns need to be examined as almost thirty percent of the coastal fishermen found in the study area can be categorized as poor fishermen having an income of less than RM529.00 a month. To understand the ownership of property among fishermen, it has much in common with

understanding land ownership among natives and natives. This is because they are legally owned but the right to use is limited as a result of existing institutional limitations (Raduan et al. 2007).

Methodology

This study involves Sedeli Kecil and Sedeli Besar areas in Sedeli, Johor. Information gathering was carried out using questionnaires among the people involved in the area. A total of 200 respondents participated during the collection of information conducted in the study area.

Result and Discussion

This article focuses on the fishing equipment ownership pattern as most of the population in the study area are fishermen. Discussion on the poverty issue among coastal fishermen can be attributed to the pattern of property ownership. Hence, the discussion will include the demographic aspects (fishermen category in Sedeli, role as fishermen and income). In addition, the need for a long-term license and the reason for being a fisherman will also affect the fishing equipment ownership pattern among them.

The Demography of Fishermen

The analysis of the residents of the Sedeli implies that the residents in these villages are homogeneous in nature. Majority of them are fishermen and mostly (64%) of the respondents met are coastal fishermen and the remaining are the deep-sea boat fishermen (Table 1). Majority of the coastal fishermen carry out their fishing activities using their own equipment, also known as small-scale fishermen. While most the fishermen in the category of deep sea boats are workers to employers who have deep sea boats. Most of them are involved as the helmsman and crew of employers who have the deep-sea boats (Table 1). Their involvement as coastal fishermen and workers to employers with deep-sea boats ultimately implicates their average monthly earnings. Referring to Table 1, it is found that 30 percent of the fishermen earn less than RM500.00 and over 60% earn between RM500.00 and RM1000.00. The average monthly income of the fishermen in the study area is RM700.00.

In addition to the fishing category, licensing requirements can also affect the fishing revenue in the study area. About 52% of the fishermen in this area have no license as fishermen. This means that some of the fishermen in this area were not registered with the Fisheries Development Authority. Without a license, it is certain that most of the facilities provided by the government such as subsidized fuel price cannot be enjoyed by the coastal fishermen involved. Additionally, the fishermen involved feel that they did not need to get a license because most of them were employees of employers who have deep sea boats. Furthermore, those who work with employers will definitely get a license and registration with the Fisheries Development Authority is not an urgent need for them.

Table 1. Demography of the Sedeli fishermen

Item	Number	Percentage
Fishermen Category:		
Coastal Fishermen	128	64
Deep-sea Boat Fishermen	72	36
Fishermen's Roles:		
Small-scale Fishermen	107	53.5
Crew	77	38.5
Helmsman	14	7.0
Owner	2	1.0
Income:		
RM250-500	60	30
RM501-1000	125	62.5
RM1001-1500	11	5.5
RM1501 and more	4	2

The duration and driving factors to become fishermen

The need analysis on the ownership pattern of fishery activities equipment is probably driven by the duration factor of the respondent becomes a fisherman. Analysis in the study area found that nearly 51% of the fishermen in the study area have between 21 to 41 years of experience as fishermen. Almost 14% of the respondents involved have been fishermen for over 41 years. This situation can be attributed to several factors which encourage them to become fishermen. Referring to Table 2, it was found that almost 35% stated that they became fishermen because of their existing skills. Interviews with a few respondents explained that they have been taught about the 'marine science' since they were young. Therefore, only on them that the hope to continue the inheritance of the marine science relies on. In addition, 39% of the respondents explained that they had no other options besides being fishermen (Table 2)

Table 2. The duration and driving factors to become fishermen

Item	Number	Percentage
Duration of being a fisherman		
1-20 years	72	36
21-40 years	101	50.5
More than 41 years	27	13.5
Total	200	100
Driving factors to become fishermen		
No options	78	39
Skilled in this field	69	34.5
Attracted to the many facilities available	1	0.5
Good return	14	7
Want to be self-employed	28	14
Others	10	5

Armed with marine science that is passed down from generation to generation with a low level of education (the majority are lower-secondary school) had left them with no choice but to become fishermen. Observation in the study area found that most of the fishermen who are not going out to sea will perform side work associated to the sea such as repairing the boats, nets and others;

"...the Fishermen consider that they are the experts in matters pertaining to boats, fishing net and fish; They distinguish themselves with the farmers and stating they are not compatible with land. ... when I pass away, my children will also be going to the sea..." (Firth 1990)

Pattern of fishery economic ownership

Over the last few years, the coastal fishermen's life has become increasingly overwhelming, in order to overcome or at least reduce the problems faced by the fishermen, the government has been using the modernization approaches (Mohd Radzi & Zaimah 2014). Various measures have been taken involving efforts to encourage the use of boats and modern fishing equipment among fishermen. The fishermen in the study also found to be involved with aids programmes such as boat subsidies, engines and trawl (Azima et al 2015).

An analysis on the requirements for the receipt of Government aids by fishermen involved in the study area explains that they need aids in fishing equipment such as boats, trawl and engines, in addition they also need financial aid (Table 3). The need for these aids is related to the current situation of fishermen in the study area who are generally unable to own the fishing equipment. The inability to obtain fishing equipment eventually lead them to be the crew or helmsman to the deep-sea boat owner.

Table 3. Aids acceptance requirement

Item	Number	Percentage
Fishing Equipment Aids		
Yes	122	61
No	78	39
Financial Aid		
Yes	124	62
No	76	38

Methods of acquiring the fishery economic equipment

An analysis of the fishery economic equipment ownership patterns (motor boats, trawl/net, small boats, engines and boats) in the study area involves three main methods of buying, hiring or borrowing and owned by the employers. Table 4 shows that nearly 50% of the fishermen in the study area are more likely to obtain their fishery economic equipment through purchases and employers. This is directly related to their involvement in fishery activities in the study area. If they are the coastal fishermen, definitely their tendency is to obtain the equipment by themselves or through the hire purchase scheme provided. Whereas for fishermen involved with deep-sea fishing activities, definitely the fishing equipment belongs to their employer.

Table 4. Methods of acquiring the fishery economic equipment

Equipment	Purchase	Rent/Borrow	Owned by Employer
Boat	99 (49.5%)	8 (4%)	93 (46.5%)
Trawl/Net	100 (50%)	7 (3.5%)	93 (46.5%)
Small Boat	99 (49.5%)	9 (4.5%)	92 (46%)
Boat Engine	96 (48%)	10 (5%)	94 (47%)

The statement related to the fishermen category and its relation to the equipment ownership pattern can be further examined using the cross-table between the type of equipment and the fishermen category (Table 5). The analysis found that the pattern of equipment ownership among the fishermen, especially the coastal fishermen (a total of 44 persons) tend to obtain it from the employer. This situation explains that there were coastal fishermen who were working with employers to earn a living. Employers for these coastal fishermen are usually the Chinese and Malay (only a few) towkays who have dominated fixed capital such as boats and others. Interviews with the fishermen who were using equipment obtained from the employer, explains that the catch from the sea will be divided into two with the owner of the fishing equipment such as boats, nets and others.

Table 5. Cross-table categories of fishermen with ownership of fishing equipment.

Type of Equipment	Fisherman Category					
	Coastal Fisherman			Deep-sea Fisherman		
	Purchase	Rent	Owned by the Employer	Purchase	Rent	Owned by the Employer
Boat	77	8	43	22	0	50
Trawl/Net	78	6	44	22	1	49
Small Boat	77	8	43	22	1	49
Boat Engine	74	10	44	22	0	50

The phenomenon that affects the coastal fisherman in Sedeli could be further detailed when the analysis made found that the majority of those interviewed admitted that they did not have fishing equipment even though they had been involved in this activity for more than 20 years. Almost 60% of the fishermen in this area do not have fishing equipment such as boat/small boat, engines and trawls. This makes them more likely to obtain them from an employer or work as a crew or a helmsman with the Chinese towkay who have deep-sea boats.

In addition, most of them admitted that the existing fishing equipment are no longer sufficient for current fishing activities. Many of the fishermen complaint that their nets and boats are no longer suitable for use, given that the catch from the nearby area is decreasing. Among the fisherman complaints found in the study area are;

"...previously, a day income can be at RM100.00 but now it's it is difficult to get RM70.00 every time we go to the sea ... there are times that the fuel cost cannot be recovered..."

The matters related to the use of fishing equipment provided by the employers were also due to the fact that most of them failed to obtain the fishery equipment aid provided by the government. Table 6 explains that most of them (over 90 percent) did not receive boat engine aid from government agencies despite submitting applications through Malaysian Department of fisheries (LKIM). It is very unfortunate that majority of the fishermen in the study area do not receive the fuel subsidy aid provided by the government. An explanation from LKIM officials pointed out that the assistance provided by the government failed to benefit the fishermen because they were not registered as a member of the fishermen association (Zaimah et al. 2015). This is because the prerequisite for the aid provided is by becoming a member of the fishermen's association.

Table 6. Received Government Aid

Aid item received	Yes	No
Boat Engine	13 (6. %)	187 (93.5)
Trawl/net	14 (7%)	186 (93%)
Fuel Subsidy	69 (34.5%)	131 (65.5%)

However, the analysis of feedbacks provided by the local fishermen found that the majority explained that they had applied for the aids but their application was unsuccessful (Table 7). Grievances from the fishermen in the study area clarified that their applications were often rejected on the ground that there was no allocation. This situation is extremely frustrating to them, for them it is easier to obtain it from the middleman. There are no prerequisites imposed, what is important is that the catch shall be sold to the provider of equipment like boats, trawl and others. This situation explains that the pattern of ownership of fisheries economic equipment in the study area is still dominated by the capitalists in particular the middleman (Azima et al. 2012).

Table 7. Reason for not receiving government's aid

Reason for not receiving government's aid	Number	Percentage
Do not know the means to obtain the aid	22	11
Unsuccessful application	101	50.5
Not qualified	20	10
Not aware of the availability of aid for fishermen	6	3
Others	18	9
Not relevant	33	16.6

Conclusion

The fishermen's economic ownership patterns in the study area explains the type of capital equipment found in the fishery economy. The concept of capital which became the public's perception of this study are the capital in the form of equipment such as boats, or in the form of capital goods belonging to the middlemen who needed a special return (Shaari 1994). Hence, the emphasis upon who owns the fisheries economic equipment in the study area finally explains that the dependency on the middlemen who provided specific alternatives in the context of equipment and market facilities is very clear.

In conclusion, the understanding of the need for ownership of fishery economic equipment among fishermen is not a foreign matter to the involved agencies. Hence, various measures have been taken to reduce the dependence of the small-scale fishermen on the declining marine resources. This is because the relationship between the fishermen and the entrepreneurs is based on the existing social and economic regulations reflected in their grievances about small income which is not accompanied by an effective solution (Sa'at 2011). Hence, research on optimizing their marine science skills should be given due consideration besides adding the aid funds in the form of equipment and finance. This is because poverty can be seen from a variety of key dimensions including material dimension, psychological dimension and the most important one is the dimension of access to piratical assets or capital assets including land, equipment, livestock, homes and others (Dear et al. 2011).

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